

COCAINE—*a Play in One
Act by Pendleton King—being
Number V of the Provincetown
Plays*



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New York FRANK SHAY Publisher

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COCAINE

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A PLAY IN ONE ACT

By PENDLETON KING

NEW YORK

FRANK SHAY, *Publisher*

1917

COCAINE

was first produced by the Provincetown Players
with the following cast

JOE	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Eugene Lincoln</i>
NORA	.	.	.	.	.	<i>Ida Rauh</i>

Produced under the direction of Margaret Wycherly.

Scene designed and executed by Ira Remsen
and Carroll Berry.

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15266
1917
MAIN

COCAINE

THE action takes place in an attic bedroom on Grand Street, between Allen and the Bowery, in the late summer of 1916, and occupies the time between four o'clock a. m. and daylight. The ceiling slopes down at the back to within a few feet of the floor. There is a dormer window in a recess at back. Door left centre, bed at right of window, table left, bureau down left, trunk down right, chair at foot of bed. The room is in terrible disorder and confusion, faintly seen in the glare from open window as curtain rises.

Joe is discovered lying on the bed asleep, snoring gently, dressed in undershirt and trousers. He is good looking, powerfully built, twenty-four years old.

Nora comes in and lights a candle on the bureau. She is a wistful looking girl of thirty.

JOE. Nora, 's 'at you?

NORA. I didn't mean to wake you up. Go on back to sleep.

JOE. I haven't been asleep. What time is it?

NORA. [*Takes off hat.*] About four o'clock.

JOE. You're pretty late.

NORA. [*Takes off jacket.*] Had to walk from uptown.

JOE. How far uptown?

NORA. O, way up town. I let a crowd shake me like a fool. [*Sits in chair at foot of bed and fans herself.*] And didn't have sense enough to get carfare. Whew! You don't realize how hot you are till you sit down.

JOE. Poor kid.

NORA. You must have had the gas lighted to make it as hot as this in here. Lord, I'm so glad to get home.

JOE [*gently*]. You didn't bring in—nothing?

NORA. Not a cent, Joe. [*Gets up and goes to bureau.*] I don't know what's the matter with me. [*Looks in glass.*] It's that darn fever blister. If I had only had sense enough to get some camphor that first day.

JOE. But it's most well now. Can't hardly notice it any more.

NORA. Of course it's perfectly well. There won't be a trace of it tomorrow. I oughtn't to have tried to go out those two days the first of the week when it was so bad. Everybody was afraid of me and it made me feel like a leper. I lost my grip in some way and now I can't get it

back. It all depends on yourself. [*Picks up candle.*] If you're sure of yourself you have luck; if you aren't, you don't. That's all there is to it. [*Crosses with candle, which she puts down on trunk.*] If I'd had a wee bit of a sniff tonight I'd have got some money out of that crowd. [*Sits on foot of the bed.*] But drinks don't brace me up somehow.

JOE. Hum. 'sright.

NORA. Poor old boy. Have you been lying here all night in this heat waiting for me? It's hard luck on you, Joe. O, I thought I'd go crazy tonight. My nerves are just all to pieces. I did think I was going to get some money this time.

JOE. Why don't you take your clothes off and come on to bed.

NORA. [*Gets up and takes a packet of cigarettes out of her jacket.*] I swiped these for you, anyway. Here. [*Throws him the box.*]

JOE. [*Catching it.*] Gee! Ta!

NORA. Joe, I wish you wouldn't say "Ta." [*Goes up into recess.*] I don't know why I hate it so. [*She begins to undress.*]

JOE. All right, Missis. [*Gets up to light his cigarette with the candle.*] Common stuff, uhm?

NORA. [*Undressing.*] No, it doesn't matter. I'm just nervous and irritable. Don't pay any attention to anything I say. If I don't get some money tomorrow I just don't know what I'll do. It's terrible to be so dependent on *anything* as that.

JOE. [*Lies down again.*] Four days.

NORA. No, tonight's Saturday.

JOE. Well, that's four days, ain't it? We finished up that last deck Tuesday night.

NORA. That's right. I wouldn't have believed I could go so long. I don't see how you stand it, Joe, all night like this, doing nothing.

JOE. I been out. Don't worry about me. I can git on widout de stuff—for awhile.

NORA. [*Comes down in kimono.*] I can't. [*Takes cigarette.*] But then I've been using it so much longer than you have. [*Lights cigarette at the candle.*]

JOE. I been goin' it some little time—a month or so before we took up together last summer.

NORA. To think. [*Sits on bed.*] Only a year. I wonder what would have become of you if I hadn't found you?

JOE. What becomes of all de other poor bastards who gets knocked out and can't get back in de ring? I don't know.

NORA. That's the trouble with you boys. You are brought up with only one idea, to fight, and if anything does happen to you, you're not fit to do anything else. You're only twenty-four, and you're done.

JOE. Be twenty-four in October, I guess.

NORA. Lord, it makes me feel so old. That's how you stand the strain the way you do. You are as firm and strong as you ever were, and look at me.

JOE. Well, if a fellow has to do as much trainin' as I used to, he more or less keeps in condition, I guess.

NORA. [*Lies down beside him.*] I feel so old, and tired, and discouraged, Joe. If I didn't have you I don't think I'd go on with it.

JOE. [*Tightens his arm about her.*] I'm stickin' to you, see.

NORA. I never thought of your leaving me. [*She puts her arm up about his head and strokes his hair.*] I love you too much, Joe. I love you more than anybody else will ever love you if you live to be a thousand years old.

JOE. I don't reckon anybody'd love me much if I was that old.

NORA. [*Laughs.*] I should. But you're only a baby now. A little old infant. [*She snuggles up to him and presses her cheek to his.*] Joe?

JOE. Um?

NORA. [*In a whisper.*] My darling. [*He gathers her closer. Long pause.*]

JOE. Tired, kid?

NORA. No, not now. I get strength from you. You've got plenty of strength for both of us, haven't you? Um?

JOE. It's funny, ain't it, for a girl like you to take up wid a rough guy like me, dat ain't never knowd nothin' but how to get his heart put on the blink. Dope brings funny people together.

NORA. Not so funny.

JOE. You needn't tell me, Kid. I may be nothing but a prizefighter, but I can tell a lady when I see one. And besides, you won't even own up to it. That's a sure sign.

NORA. [*Laughs.*] Not a very fine kind of a lady. I've told you all about myself. I did work on the *Evening Sun*, and before that I used to live on a farm in Kentucky. That's all there is.

JOE. Well, that's what you say. I don't want you to tell me nothing you don't want to. [*Moves his position slightly.*] Are you all right?

NORA. Yes.

JOE. I got something I want to talk to you about. We're up against it.

NORA. I know we are. And yet I can lie here like this and it doesn't seem possible that there is such a thing as trouble in the world. It is so serene to lie still, and just stroke your hair. I don't want ever to move again. I can feel your heart beating. Do you feel how much faster mine is going than yours?

JOE. Yeah.

[*The sound of the Elevated is heard.*]

NORA. The Elevated sounds like wind. Like a spirit that can't rest. The spirit of the city, that goes on and on day and night and never stops and never will stop, no matter what becomes of you and me. But when I am lying close to you like this, touching you,—there's a sort of electric current that radiates from you all over because you're so alive. What was I going to say? What was I talking about?

JOE. You was talking about the El.

NORA. Yes. I was going to say while I am lying close to you like this it all seems so far away, doesn't it? It is like lying snug in bed and listening to the sea. There may be death and storms and shipwrecks and things out there, but they're far away. They can never touch us.

JOE. I wisht we could get a good old sniff, and forget our troubles right.

NORA. Poor old Joe. [*Raises up and sits on the side of the bed again.*] I declare I thought I would go crazy tonight; I haven't got a nerve left in my body. I wanted to know what you were doing. I thought all sorts of fool things. I could picture you getting desperate and breaking in somewhere and getting locked up, and I don't know what.

JOE. I could have got some stuff tonight, at that.

NORA. What do you mean? How? Who?

JOE. The landlady. She was up here talking to me about it.

NORA. When she knows how broke we are? We owe her two weeks' rent.

JOE. No, I guess she would have give me some.

NORA. How do you mean, Joe?

JOE. You know.

NORA. Do you mean to tell me that woman has been up here after you again? [*Her eyes narrow.*] I knew something was the matter. Did you—— What did you tell her?

JOE. Told her to get to hell out of here. What do you think I told her? I said I was off de stuff.

NORA. [*Buries her head in his shoulder.*] O, Joe.

JOE. Well,—I didn't want it so bad then. She come up here when she heard me come in, about twelve o'clock, and put it up to me.

NORA. [*Desperate.*] If we had any other place on earth we could go, I would have got out of this house the night you told me she first came up here and bothered you. But we couldn't get another place. She'd hold our things until we paid her. And I haven't got a dollar to deposit on a room. I suppose she knows all that.

JOE. That's what I got to talk to you about. She's going to kick us out.

NORA. Kick us out?

JOE. That's what she says. Unless——

NORA. Unless what?

JOE. Well,—you know—— I been thinking pretty hard and figurin' on puttin' it up to you, if you think it's worth while—just to keep the room on and have a place to sleep. You see——

NORA. What are you talking about?

JOE. Well,—I think the old lady's reasonable. She come up here and made a big fuss over me and said she was gone on me and all that stuff, and I was staying on in her house and not paying no rent and everything, and—if I was too good for her I'd have to get out of her house, that's all. That was after she offered me the dope.

NORA. Joe, am I mad or what are you talking about?

JOE. Well——

NORA. Never let me hear that again. Do you think I'd let you——

JOE. Well, I let you, don't I?

NORA. That's altogether a different matter. Don't ever let me hear that again, do you understand? I can't argue about it. [*Gets up and crosses to bureau.*] God, it's hot in here!

JOE. [*Swings his feet out and sits on the side of the bed. Kindly:*] Now look here, kid. [*Stands a moment and goes over to her.*] I got to live, ain't I? You are the swellest little girl any fellow ever had and all that, and I'm awful fond of you, but we got to live. We got to do something. We got to get some money some way. If we can't get on—the way we been gettin' on, then I got to shift for myself, see? [*Takes her by the shoulders.*] I'm puttin' it up to you square, because I'm goin' to be straight with you.

NORA. Of course we've got to do something. I'll do something. I'll get some money. You don't understand what you are saying. If it were the last night we'd ever spend under a roof it wouldn't alter the question.

JOE. [*Turns back to the bed.*] By God, it looks like it is the last night, with the luck you're having. [*He sits and leans his chin on his right hand, gazing at the candle.*] If I was able to do any kind of work it'd be different. But de stuff's got me I guess. I couldn't no more stick to any kind of a job than I could fly. You reckon if I was able to get back in the ring I'd have you working? But we're up against it, that's all. As long as you can bring in the money—all right. But you ain't having any luck, and I just got to do it, that's all. If I'm willing for you to go out every night, I don't see why you kick on one old measly landlady.

NORA. But Joe. You don't understand. [*Crosses to bed.*] Listen to me. [*Sits beside him.*] You don't love me the way I do you. It isn't your fault. It's the way you're made. I can—go out, as you call it—— It's a sort of sacrifice to you, a sort of way of showing how much I love you. It doesn't matter about me. You are the clean part of me. You are the part I live for. And you are sacred, do you understand? Clean.

JOE. [*Still gazing at candle.*] Sure, I get you. [*Nora slips down on one knee and buries her face against his arm.*] And I've always been straight with you. I think a whole lot more of you than you think.

NORA. Go on. Say you love me. I love to hear you say it.

JOE. [*Puts his left arm about her.*] I love you all right. And I'll stick to you. But we got to live, ain't we? We got to get some money some way. And if you can't get it, I got to. That's if we're going to stick together.

NORA. No, you haven't, Joe. I'd rather be dead. [*Raises up.*] I'll starve to death before I'll see you do that, and let you starve to death. [*Gets up.*] The horrible old slut. I think I'll kill her. [*Goes up into alcove and looks out of window.*]

JOE. O, we can get out of here if you want to. It don't have to be her. There's more'n one way of pickin' up money round this town.

NORA. [*Turns toward him.*] What do you mean?

JOE. I guess you must know. It's the only way I see. I ain't got nothing but my looks.

NORA. [*Turns back to window.*] Joe, don't talk like that, *please*.

JOE. [*Kindly.*] We got to, kid. We're up against it. I'm going to be fair with you, that thing you got on your mouth ain't going to get well so as you can't see it for two or three days yet. We get kicked out of here today. What the hell can we do? Sleep in the park? I guess not. Not while I got a way to make easy money. Why, kid, I wisht you'd see the number of 'em tries to speak to me every time I go out. It's easy, I tell you. And there's good money in it. I don't like to talk about it—specially with you—but we got to—if we're going to stick together. We can get a nice room somewheres and keep a little stuff on hand all the time. I ain't going to leave you. But I gotta have de stuff, that's all. [*Lies down on the bed and turns toward the wall.*] I've gone without it four days now.

NORA. [*Comes down and crosses to trunk.*] You are a strange boy. [*Sits on end of trunk facing him.*] Can't you see that you are the only thing I've got left in the world?

JOE. But I ain't leaving you, I tell you.

NORA. Don't you understand that I found you when you were

down and out, done for? That you belong to me? I saved you from this very thing, I suppose, a year ago. Don't you see, darling?

JOE. [*Turns on his back.*] But I'm not—— Gees, Nora, can't you listen to me? I don't want to do it, kid, but we got to, to live.

NORA. But don't you understand that I wouldn't touch you with a ten foot pole afterwards? Don't you see that?

JOE. [*Turning back in a huff.*] Of course, if you feel that way about it, we can bust up, 's far as that goes. If you don't think no more about me than that.

NORA. [*Stands up against the wall. Right.*] Don't, Joe.

JOE. [*Sits up in bed.*] I've always been straight with you. I've treated you right all the way, and I'm trying to stick by you. But of course, if that's the way you feel about it, all right. I got to live, ain't I?

NORA. No.

JOE. What do you mean no?

NORA. I don't see any reason why we should live.

JOE. Well, I'm going to live.

NORA. [*Sits down on bed and tries to turn him towards her.*] Joe, my darling, listen to me. You've been a wonderful boy and I love you as very few people have ever been loved in this world. Because I had lost everything, you see, when I found you, everything. I had thrown everything away. And you've had to be the whole world for me since. The whole world, you see. There isn't anything else. When the dope got me I just went down because I didn't care about anything. I gave up my job and just let myself slide. I intended to kill myself when my money gave out, and I didn't even care how much I had left. Then I found you that night at Mitchell's place.

JOE. [*Turns on his back.*] I remember.

NORA. [*Puts her head down on his chest.*] You can't remember much. I can't bear to think even now how you were beat up. But you were so full of it you didn't know your arm was broken.

JOE. That's right. I think it was broke about two days before that. I remember when it went.

NORA. And since then, Joe, we've had a wonderful time. Do you remember when we used to have to sleep under the Bridge? I love that old Bridge now because it's associated in my mind with you.

JOE. We had a good time, all right.

NORA. [*Straightens up.*]

"But now the white sails of our ship are furled,

"And spent the lading of our argosy."

We've come to the end of our tether, Joe.

JOE. Um.

NORA. What do you say we don't go on with it?

JOE. What do you mean don't go on with it?

NORA. Turn on the gas.

JOE. [*Sits up.*] Nix! What are you gettin' at? [*Lies down.*] Not for mine.

NORA. Joe, we've had such a wonderful time. We've known everything there is to know in the world worth knowing. Don't let's go down hill. We've reached the top. Let's let this be the end. I can't keep you any longer and have got to let you go. And I won't do it, that's all.

JOE. [*Sits up and props himself against the head of the bed incredulously.*] You must be kiddin'. Aw, come on.

NORA. [*Quietly.*] I never was more serious in my life. I can't go on with it, and I won't leave you behind to live without me. It's you that I love, the little strange spirit that makes you you, and different to everybody else that ever lived. If you go on you are going to destroy that. Then you won't be you, and I won't love you any more. Think. This may be the last night we'll ever spend together—the last chance we'll have. Let's turn it on now. No telling [*she turns front*] what'll happen in the daylight tomorrow. I can't wait to face it.

JOE. I don't want to, kid. It aint' right to kill yourself.

NORA. Are you afraid to die?

JOE. Sure I'm not afraid to die.

NORA. What have you got to live for?

JOE. Well—a lot of things, I guess.

NORA. Joe, you've slipped. You've slipped away further than I thought. The stuff's got you sure enough. You've slipped further than I have.

JOE. I guess not. I'm not so bad off at that.

NORA. [*Slightly hysterical.*] You're pretty bad off, Joe. Don't you see that your life is finished. You are nothing. You are less than nothing. What you really are is the lowest thing that can be on earth, and here you talk calmly about—something even worse. There's no reason for you to go on living—except your fear of death.

JOE. I'm not afraid of dying, I tell you.

NORA. [*Rising.*] Well, let me turn on the gas then. I'm not afraid. Look at me. Think of the trouble it takes to live. Think of the effort to keep yourself going on and on, like a rat in a trap. And when you lose me you'll just slip and slip. And you've got to die in the end anyhow. And when you're dead it won't make any difference to you how long you lived. It will be just as if you'd never been born.

JOE. [*Sits up and follows her with his eyes.*] I don't get you.

NORA. O, I just can't face the daylight again, Joe. I'm too tired. Aren't you tired? What will become of you without me to take care of you? [*She is edging towards the gas jet in the alcove.*]

JOE. I don't know.

NORA. Let's turn on the gas. Then we won't have to wake up in the morning and be bothered. And you can't tell—maybe—— But I believe you're scared.

JOE. [*Lies down and turns face to the wall petulantly.*] Aw, turn on your god damned gas. I'll show you whether I'm scared.

NORA. [*In an excited whisper.*] O, Joe.

[*She closes the window and hangs an old skirt over it, turns on the gas jet and the gas stove on the table, then comes down on tip toe, trembling, and blows out the candle on the trunk. The stage is completely dark.*]

JOE. Did you turn it on?

NORA. [*Gets back into the bed.*] Yes. The stove, too.

JOE. How long will it take?

NORA. Not long I think. I don't know. Don't let's talk about it. Joe, do you think I've got the right to take you with me?

JOE. With you? Where?

NORA. Now. Like this. But I couldn't bear for anybody else to have you, Joe.

JOE. Gee, you're tremblin'. I believe you're scared now.

NORA. I'm not scared. I'm just happy.

JOE. Happy?.....!

NORA. I thought I'd lost you, Joe.

JOE. Um. [*Very long pause.*] This is a tough thing to do, all right, kid. You reckon they'll put it in the papers?

NORA. I expect so.

JOE. Will they put in much? They'll be sure to find out who we was. You got letters and stuff in the trunk.

NORA. We weren't anybody much. I expect they've forgotten about us.

JOE. Aw. They got to put it in the papers.

NORA. They'll put in something. Please don't let's talk about it. Joe?

JOE. Um?

NORA. [*In a whisper.*] My darling.

[*Long pause.*]

JOE. [*With a tremor in his voice.*] I don't smell no gas.

NORA. It hasn't had time yet. Maybe we won't smell it.

JOE. Gee, we got to smell it. [*The bed creaks.*] I don't smell nothing way down here.

NORA. Just wait and you will. It's only been on a minute. O, Joe, come on back here. We've only got such a little while.

JOE. I'm going to see what's the matter. Gimme a match. [*The bed creaks as he gets out.*]

NORA. For heaven's sake! Don't strike a match! Might be an explosion!

JOE. It can't blow up if you can't smell it. [*He finds matches on the trunk and crosses to centre stage.*] I can smell it over here. [*Strikes a match to the gas burner, which lights in a feeble blue flame.*] Gees, the meter's run out on us.

NORA. [*Sits up in bed.*] The meter? But it can't have run out. [*A wave of terror comes over her.*] Have you been using the gas nights?

JOE. Not but very little.

NORA. But that's ridiculous. I haven't got a quarter to put in it. What can we do?

JOE. Nothin'—'less we had a quarter.

NORA. [*Laughs.*] But that's ridiculous. We've got to do something.

JOE. Naw, I guess not.

NORA. But, Joe——!!!

JOE. [*With a note of relief in his voice.*] Naw, I guess it wasn't meant for us to kick out tonight, kid. [*Gently.*] Let's get the window open.

[*He takes down the old skirt and opens the window. The dawn has come up outside.*]
Gee, it's daylight.

[CURTAIN.]

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